



Poverty In America

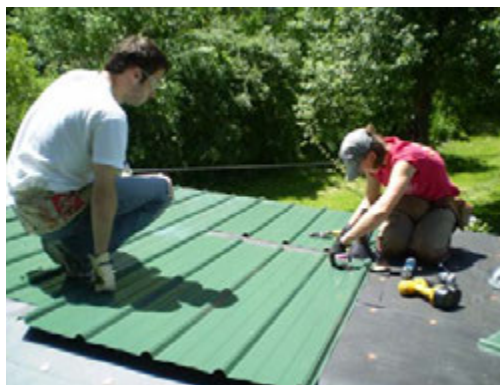
A Senior Perspective – Service Learning Course (SRP 470)

Students travel to West Virginia and live with a community that serves those of the area in various forms of outreach. There are opportunities for assisting in home repair, tutoring children, gathering and cooking for community night, visiting elderly and/or homebound...and coming to know the particular strengths and perspectives of those who deal with poverty day to day, all their lives. The community the students live with emphasizes the importance of simplicity, prayer, service, community and sustainability. The course itself has three components; **academics, service and reflection.**

Academics

- a challenge to use what has been learned in a way that has a significant impact on the integrity and dignity of people accustomed to being demeaned.

This component allows the articulation of their knowledge in their chosen field and the application of that knowledge to real life situations, but it does so in a setting that calls on students to not only provide their services but to dignify those they serve. They integrate the research they are doing during the course with the experiences they are having as they develop relationships with those at their work sites. Their knowledge and skills, nurtured and guided in the process of writing their paper, provide the support and foundation which allows them to see the significance of their shared humanity with those they serve.



Reflection

-it is in the process of articulation that this experience becomes rooted in the student's core, transforming them, enabling them to respond, passionately to this call.

The sequence of reflection questions is such that the students progress from questions requiring simple answers based on observations to questions requiring application of their knowledge, then to questions provoking introspective narrative. The final reflections address the "what now" question requiring students to articulate the affect these experiences will have on their profession and on their lives. It is through this reflection and feedback process that they will learn of what is around them, but also of what is deeply within them.

Service

"We serve life, not because it is broken, but because it is holy." -Mother Theresa

Students replace rotting roofs, install insulation, build handicap ramps, scrape and paint houses, bale hay, but in the process, a transformation occurs. What started out as service results in relationship. Students come afraid of poverty and leave embracing the poor. There is a great sense of accomplishment in finishing a roof, but a stronger sense of exhilaration at the friendship with those living under it. It is no longer about tasks, but about people, no longer about doing things, but about being there. It is no longer about poverty, but about honoring that which is sacred.

(poster by - Alice Smith)